

Room for visualisation

Sue Green

Without a good plan, a kitchen or bathroom makeover can be a tricky and costly project.



Tailor-made: Kitchen by Katrina Luxton of Royston Wilson Design. Photos: Ben Wrigley/Photohub.

The champagne was iced, the celebratory dinner cooked, the ribbon ready for cutting by the special guests. The celebration: completion of a bathroom renovation. After six weeks of showering at the neighbours', the bathroom owners had invited them to a slap-up thank-you dinner.

Renovating kitchens and bathrooms are potentially a home owner's most stressful undertaking. Numerous trades are involved, the potential for design or building errors substantial, and the prospect of weeks of cooking with a microwave in the lounge room or using a backyard Portaloo uninviting.

Mark Parry, owner of Hebden Kitchens and Bathrooms, says research is the key to success. "Would you spend \$50,000 on a car without doing your homework?" he asks. "Would you want a warranty or some type of guarantee on your purchase? Then why should a kitchen or bathroom renovation be any different when you could be spending a similar amount of money?"



"Make sure your work is guaranteed; that the tradesmen, builder or cabinetmaker are registered with the Building Commission, not just an organisation. When getting quotes, make sure you are comparing apples with apples - make sure the specifications for your renovation are the same from each company."

Royston Wilson, principal of Royston Wilson Design, says many clients know they need a renovation but don't know what they want. Brochures, magazine cuttings and printouts from websites can help identify preferences. But it is also important to be clear on dislikes.

Wilson advocates using a professional designer, saying "the builder will often make suggestions that are easiest for him to do and what he thinks looks all right". Check designers' work to ensure their style suits and their work comes recommended, he says.

For example, the waterproof membrane in a bathroom must be correctly installed, especially with walk-in showers. If not, it will leak. Also, the floor must fall towards the drain or water will flood other rooms.

Whether using a designer or doing it yourself, it is crucial to be clear on what you want from the outset. "If you make changes on the run, that's where things go awry," Wilson says.

Owen Barnes, principal designer at Bubbles Bathrooms, says a three-part design process is important.

Spatial planning includes functionality - for example, how many people will use the rooms, and when; work-flow planning such as accessibility and not having a shower door opposite the doorway; and storage location.

Visual planning includes lighting, colour and product style - he warns that sometimes things that look great in the showroom are not as good when put together.

Functional planning includes airflow (for example, new water-saving showers create more steam so more powerful fans are needed); heating and storage; and product functionality - making sure appliances suit the home owner's needs and storage is correct.

Experts identify several key trends for bathroom and kitchen renovation. Wilson says small, built-in vacuum systems in kitchens are increasingly popular and reduce sweeping.

Parry says a servo-drive electric drawer opener, about \$200 a drawer, is "a great innovation in the kitchen. You touch the drawer or lean against it and it opens automatically. "It's great for bin drawers ... fantastic while your prepping meals as you don't have to touch anything," he says.

Barnes favours perching spots and multilevel work surfaces in the kitchen. The kitchen is now a home's entertainment hub, and spots where friends and family can sit and chat are crucial, he says. He says free-standing, composite stone baths are popular, but without a large bathroom cleaning can be a little difficult. "You can half-build a bath in to create visual impact and make cleaning easier," he says.